



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Hepatitis B

(serum hepatitis)

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver caused by a virus. Hepatitis B virus (HBV) can cause lifelong infection, scarring of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure and death.

How do you get it?

HBV is spread when blood or other body fluids from an infected person enters the body of someone who is not infected. HBV can be spread through sexual contact, by sharing drugs or needles, through needlesticks or sharps exposures in healthcare settings, or from an infected mother to her baby at birth.

HBV is not spread through food or water, sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, kissing, coughing, sneezing or by casual contact.

Blood donations are routinely screened for HBV in Hawaii, and those that test positive for HBV are not given to patients.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

The symptoms include jaundice (yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes), abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, tiredness, loss of appetite and dark colored urine. There is usually no fever. A person can be infected with HBV and have no symptoms. Adults are more likely to have symptoms than children.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually begin about 3 months after infection with the virus, but may start in 2 to 6 months.

For how long is a person contagious?

HBV is present in the blood and other body fluids of an infected person several weeks before symptoms start, and the person remains infectious to others for months afterward. If a person becomes a carrier of HBV, they remain potentially infectious to others for life.

What is the treatment for hepatitis B?

There are no medicines available for acute HBV infection. A doctor can prescribe medicines for treatment of chronic HBV infection.

How can you keep from hepatitis B?

Receiving the HBV vaccine is the best way to prevent the disease. The vaccine is given in 3 doses over a period of 6 months. HBV vaccine is recommended for all babies at birth, all children under 18 who have not been vaccinated, and people of any age whose behavior or job puts them at high risk for HBV infection.

If you are pregnant, you should get a blood test for HBV.

Use latex condoms correctly every time you have sex.

Do not shoot drugs. If you shoot drugs, stop and get into a treatment program. If you can't stop, never share drugs, needles, syringes, or water, and get vaccinated against HBV.

Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them, such as razors or toothbrushes.

Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have someone else's blood on them or if the artist does not follow proper hygiene practices.

Persons infected with hepatitis must not donate blood, organs or tissue.

If you are a health care or public safety worker, get vaccinated against HBV and always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps.

For more information, see the CDC's website at:
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/b/index.htm>